

Bolton Hill

Community Association

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Christmas decorations dazzle on Lafayette Avenue

<https://boltonhillmd.org/bulletin/christmas-decorations-dazzle/>



The exterior at 225 W. Lafayette Ave

This year, the sidewalk in front of 225 Lafayette Avenue presents a spectacular display of twinkling lights, layers of greenery, a lighted Christmas Tree, and garlands of colorful glass baubles tucked under a new black and white striped awning. Through the front windows, you can see more lights, sumptuous bronze and silver garlands, beautiful flower arrangements, sculpted tabletops, and candles galore. (***More photos on the BHCA Facebook and Instagram pages.***)

It is an amazing, not-to-be-missed extravaganza that changes every year. Jake Boone, real estate agent and floral designer extraordinaire, creates magic. He and his partner of 30 years, Bryan Jones, begin decorating in early November and spend their nights and weekends leading up to Thanksgiving to achieve the year's design.

Jake noted that "this year's look is spare.... I didn't hang anything from the ceiling for fear that the living room ceiling would come down." The décor is anything but spare! Never satisfied, Boone added a lighted Christmas tree to the outside space in December, saying, "I really needed to kick up the front a notch!"

A new feature this year is a sailcloth over the front door and downstairs windows, providing extra space for guests and weather protection when needed. Boone sketched out the idea in the fall and shared it with longtime friend Brian Loane of Loane Bros., who said it was doable. He arranged for its fabrication and installation, using the Afghan tailor who advertises on the fence at Memorial Church to sew the canvas. The sailcloth will stay up throughout the holiday season.

Since he was little, Boone says, he has loved decorating for Christmas. As a child of 7 or 8, he would make outdoor window decorations at his Roland Park home, creating green spheres by poking boxwood twigs into a base of potatoes. He recalls his mother being terrified of what he would try next. For a

number of years, Boone was in charge of the decor for the St Vincent's Children's Christmas party in the school gym. Under his direction, the event grew from decorating 10 or 12 trees in the first year to decorating over 300 trees seven years later, transforming the gym into a Christmas wonderland created by an army of volunteers all in one day.

While not at that scale, Boone continues to have “fun with flowers and décor when called upon.” He is considered one of the premier floral designers in Baltimore for weddings and parties but says he is a realtor first and foremost.

Boone moved to Bolton Hill 38 years ago. He and his partner live with three huge dogs: Airedale Ellie, Bernedoodle Tyler, and Bernese Mountain Dog Hank, who manage to navigate the Christmas splendor without harm to the decorations. According to Boone, who quotes Dorothy, “there is no place like Bolton Hill!” And there is no place like the Christmas décor on West Lafayette Avenue!

--*Sallye Perrin*

A new Bolton Hill holiday tradition comes to Park Avenue

<https://boltonhillmd.org/bulletin/fopam-new-traditions/>



Credit: Scott Klarner

Once the fountains were turned off in October, the Friends of the Park Avenue Medians (FOPAM) missed the lights and the community First Friday gathering that has become a popular neighborhood-wide monthly event. So, this December neighbors installed a lit “tree” in each of the two median fountains and hosted the first holiday tree lighting – with hot drinks for all.

Dozens of neighbors bundled up and counted down to the lighting of the trees. There is lots of enthusiasm for making this an annual tradition!

But as lovely as our fountains are, they are in need of repair. Even more critical are the eight historic urns. FOPAM is seeking to raise \$200,000 for capital improvements to the Park, and to refurbish and make critical safety repairs to our historic urns and fountains. Yes, that’s a lot of money!! But, just repairing and refurbishing the three urns in the worst condition will require \$30,000, and repairing and modernizing the fountain electrical systems may require \$10,000.

Volunteers led by Gary and Bobbi Schilling keep the park planted and spiffy. The city Department of Recreation and Parks keep it mowed and turn the fountain on and off seasonally. Anything else is up to the neighborhood.

Through the Bolton Hill Community Association (BHCA), we have applied for state bond bill funds and plan to apply for additional grants. These grants require matching funds from the community, and donations will also help us get started with the repairs. Please give as generously as you can, through the BHCA website. (BHCA is a 501(c)(3) organization and so contributions are tax-deductible).

If you have questions about the proposed plans, wish to help with fundraising, or just want to be on the mailing list, please contact FOPAM@boltonhillmd.org.

--Lisa Summers

Ending zoning restrictions can mean more housing options in Bolton Hill

<https://boltonhillmd.org/bulletin/zoning-housing-options/>



Credit: Adobe Stock Photos

BHCA opposes the bill before the city council that would end restrictive zoning and allow property owners as a matter of right to divide single houses into up to four units as a matter of right. There are voices in the neighborhood that disagree.

There's been much discussion in the BHCA about the Housing Options and Opportunities Act (SB 25-0066), under consideration by the city council. The bill would effectively end single-family zoning across Baltimore, allowing duplexes and other multi-family homes everywhere in Baltimore. While the full impact of this change is still unknown, I believe the bill would help address the significant quality-housing shortage we have in Baltimore by removing restrictions that have prevented densification and construction of new housing in the places where people want to live.

We need to come to terms with the fact that, like many other cities across the country, Baltimore is dealing with a housing shortage. It may be harder to identify where and how due to the disparities in housing stock across Baltimore, but it is here and it is real. We have significantly fewer quality housing options in the places where people want to live, despite there being meaningful demand to live in Baltimore, particularly near public transit in communities like Bolton Hill.

I personally know families who started their time in Bolton Hill as renters but were unable to find affordable housing here for them to stay on as their family grew. These are families who are members of Bolton Swim and Tennis Club and who send their children to Bolton Hill Nursery, and likely wanted to stay. If there were more and different housing opportunities, I believe they would have. Now they are invested in other neighborhoods and other communities instead of building our own.

Imagine the opportunities and community strength that could be entrenched in Bolton Hill if we were able to meet more peoples' needs with more varieties of housing. These new zoning laws provide for that, with the easier creation of new (rentable) garden apartments that allow homeowners to afford entry prices for expensive row homes. Or similarly, these zoning laws allow new housing units for in-law suites to accommodate bigger, extended families. Similar housing models have worked in DC, where garden

apartments, multi-unit additions, and rentable in-law suites are so common that they effectively subsidize homeownership in a time of rising home prices and high interest rates. Such accommodations are almost unheard of here in Baltimore because creating them was more difficult and in many cases illegal; that would change.

At the same time, I understand that large-scale change to the zoning laws brings unforeseen consequences and the fear of negligent landlords and developers buying up housing stock to make new apartments. This is unjustified for two reasons. First, the housing market in our neighborhood is robust and demand is high for existing stock, so competition to convert existing housing into four or more units by developers seems unlikely when other, cheaper conversions would be available nearby, such as in empty lots or areas that have seen less development where the value proposition is higher. And second, there is little evidence from our existing renter and landlord community that they would be absent or out of touch with the neighborhood. Of course, we can't predict the future, and that is why the legislation offers retrospective reviews as the full effect becomes known.

Putting fear aside, I honestly believe that our community is strong already and will only get stronger if we are open to more people living in Bolton Hill, the neighboring communities, and throughout Baltimore. Increasing the kinds of housing availability makes that possible, and we should not lose sight of the original intention of single-family zoning laws. They were explicitly designed to exclude and to preserve the racial and social demographics of neighborhoods. We should be ready to move beyond such history and not inadvertently preserve that particular character of this neighborhood and others. Instead, we should seek a brighter future with more housing options for more people, in Baltimore and in Bolton Hill.

--Adam Aviv is a professor of computer science at the George Washington University. He and his family are Bolton Hill residents.

Neighborhood neglected properties stable with no new additions

<https://boltonhillmd.org/bulletin/neglected-properties-stable/>



1700 Eutaw Place

Efforts to encourage owners of neglected Bolton Hill properties to fix them up or sell them to new owners have reached a stable point, with no new recent additions to the list.

“We are continuing to track 25 mismanaged properties,” Jeff Thompson, who chairs BHCA’s Neglected and Mismanaged Properties Committee, told the December association meeting. Ten of these properties are in legal proceedings: 5 are in foreclosure (or in court to determine ownership) and 5 are in receivership, he said. Four of these have cases this month, so some progress is underway.

Additionally, Thompson said, “We have 15 properties on our ‘Watch List,’ of which seven recently have received citations for trash, weeds, maintenance, or failure to obtain required rental registration or licensing. Most of these properties have non-resident owners.

Separately, several Bolton Hill residents have testified or written the City Council for BHCA in opposition to Council Bill 25-0066. If signed into law it would permit property owners to subdivide single-family rowhouses into up to four units as a matter of right, without city zoning or council review. Those opposing the bill say it invites absentee investors to acquire large residences like those in Bolton Hill and profit from renting them out with little maintenance.

One neglected property up for court review is the building at 1700 Eutaw Place, at Wilson Street. An architect and lawyer representing New York investors who owned that property came to a BHCA meeting in March 2020, wanting the association to endorse their plan for renovating what once was the Kensett House Apartments, which even then was long-vacant and in decay. They had plans for a 24-unit renewal with some market rate rentals and others subsidized. BHCA endorsed the plan.

Responding to BHCA recent nudging, the city's Department of Housing and Community Development has become involved but has, so far, declined to petition to put the property into receivership, which might lead to an ownership change.

—*Bill Hamilton*

Artist of the Month: John Seeley elevates art space at Memorial Episcopal Church

<https://boltonhillmd.org/bulletin/john-seely-artist-of-the-month/>



John Seeley with Sister Moon

It was November 2024, when the fine art exhibition *Return of the Light* was being organized for a newly renovated space at Memorial Episcopal Church. Curator John Seeley realized that the show was short on sculptures. With necessity being the mother of invention, Seeley went to work on a large piece of walnut wood, with an idea and a chain saw. (***More of John Seeley's art can be found on the BHCA Instagram and Facebook pages.***)

The idea became his sculpture, *Brother Fire*. Emerging from the timber is a figure, one that is a visual representation of a phrase from a prayer by St. Francis of Assisi, *The Cantic of the Creatures*: “Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire, by whom you light up the night.”

This prayer inspired another Seeley sculpture recently exhibited in the Memorial show *A Diverse Community*. Created from zelkova wood (from his yard) and gaffer tape, it's titled *Sister Moon and Stars*. The piece features a sweeping silver elongated figure, reaching high and captured mid-dance. Stars in bright colors surround her. Seeley says, “Sculpture is about movement, gestures and recording those gestures. The art is static but aspires to motion, and that tension is palpable.”

Seeley works with both sculpture and painting. He began his studies in fine arts at what is now L'École européenne supérieure d'art de Bretagne, France, where in the late 1980s he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees. Afterwards, he attended MICA's Reinhart School for a second master's degree in sculpture. Then, in the early 1990s, Seeley became involved in Memorial Episcopal Church, creating sets for the Memorial Players. He did that for over two decades. In the early aughts, Seeley spent time in Bethlehem, Palestine, where he studied icon painting. There he learned about the procedural aspects of icon art, such as using egg tempera and water gilding to lay gold leaf. Two panel icons, *St. Michael* and

St. Sergius and Bacchus, resulted from this study. The portraits incorporate gold leaf and stylized lines, in the tradition of pre-Renaissance Byzantine icon painting. Seeley explains, “I use gold in my art as a practical, physical representation of “Light.” This is in keeping with historic traditional artistic practice and as an element of Christian iconography. This is different from using gold for purely decorative purposes or as an expression of opulence or power.”

In addition to being a sculptor, painter, and curator, Seeley serves as the church’s Verger, a lay minister role that ranges from escorting processions to ensuring bulletins are printed. His work reflects the congregation’s commitment to community building. Earlier this year, he led *Environmental Stewardship: Seen Through Your Lens*, a collaborative project with City Weeds and Brown Girl Wellness in which participants photographed both sides of Eutaw Place and displayed their framed images. The project united art and community—central to Seeley’s mission. “Visual art opens space for conversation, communication, and engagement. It’s a starting point,” he says.

Originally from Northern Virginia, Seeley talks about the various neighborhoods in which he has lived in Baltimore since attending MICA. Yet throughout, “I was always trying to figure out how to get back to Bolton Hill.” Now, Seeley lives on Bolton Place with his partner Paul Seaton, a retired faculty member from JHU. They were married at Memorial Episcopal in 2013. Interestingly, Seeley comes from a family of artists. His mother was a spinner, weaver, dollmaker and puppeteer. All three of his siblings are creatives: painters and playwrights.

Two examples of Seeley’s work are on permanent view at Memorial Episcopal. In the Historical Chapel to the right, a 2007 painting *Icon of the Holy Family* is a wonderful example of icon painting. And in the Peace and Justice Chapel on the left is a 1999 sculpture in memory of Matthew Shepard and dedicated to him and all victims of hate crimes. The sculpture is an abstracted figure of Shepard, with a plaque below. There is gold leaf incorporated, but you cannot see it. You will have to ask Seeley where the goldleaf is, and why. art@memorialepisiscopal.org Keep up with the exhibitions at the church by visiting <https://www.memorialboltonhill.org/thearts>.

--*Francine Marchese is an artist and teacher.*

Reservoir Square Developer wants to build more townhouses

<https://boltonhillmd.org/bulletin/resevoir-square-updates/>



MCB Real Estate, the developer of Reservoir Square at 700 W. North Avenue with 120 townhouses so far, is asking for community support to allow it to build 52 more single-family units where once they had planned a mixed-use office/residential/retail building. MCB Managing Partner David Bramble and several others from the firm met with Reservoir Hill and Bolton Hill community members on Dec. 1.

The original plan was to build a mixed-use building at the corner of North and Park Avenue, with a first-floor grocery store and retail stores, with apartments on the upper levels. For various reasons this plan was abandoned, and the grocery store and retail are now being built on the next block at 600 W North Avenue.

Bramble confirmed that, as promised, Streets Market has signed a lease to occupy a retail strip at the adjacent block, with construction of the grocery store and retail space ready to proceed. Similarly, the high rise office building on the west end of the block, currently under construction, is already leased to the city to house a workforce development agency.

Bramble said that, after exploring all options and “doing the math,” MCB determined that only town homes were feasible to replace the high-rise mixed-use building. He has previously said that there is no room for further retail, and ruled out green space, community space, rental apartments or condos or other alternatives.

Reservoir Hill Association President Keondra Prier said her organization would not oppose the changes. RHA sent a survey to selected residents of Reservoir Hill and Bolton Hill asking for opinions and got a mixed response. The piece of land in question, Parcel C, is zoned C2 (commercial) which does not permit town homes. Building them requires approval by the city zoning board. A public hearing on the zoning change has not been scheduled. Public comments can be sent by email to bmza@baltimorecity.gov.

--Jean Marie Adrian

BHCA's annual giving guide can help with your year-end philanthropy

<https://boltonhillmd.org/bulletin/bhca-giving-guide-2025/>



It's a time to reflect on our good fortune in Bolton Hill. We live in a real community that provides a web of friendship and support to its residents.

Each year at this time, the neighborhood Social Action Task Force (SATF) circulates BHCA's online [Volunteer and Giving Guide](#). We hope that reading about these creative and engaging projects inspires our Bolton Hill neighbors to give and get involved. With everyone's participation we can help create the safe and healthy Baltimore that we all desire.

Whether you resonate with seniors, youths or everyone in between, there are local community organizations that would welcome your participation. These chaotic times can make us feel hopeless, like nothing can be done. Volunteering provides the antidote. It energizes our spirit while we actively improve our own community. Plus, working together is the best way to break down the social barriers that can separate us.

These times are also difficult financially for non-profits, with many recovering from COVID hardships only to be hit by an ever-changing funding climate and government cutbacks. Please consider giving generously to as many organizations as possible. Money as well as in-kind donations are needed; see listings for details.

Gratitude and generosity can melt hatred and heal the sordid history of injustice that has plagued our city. See the [SATF's Volunteer and Giving Guide here](#).

—Peter Van Buren

Bolton Hill Notes

<https://boltonhillmd.org/bulletin/bolton-hill-notes-dec25/>



BHCA Block Captains organized; more needed

An idea long promoted by BHCA board member Barbara Francis, 51 Bolton Hill neighbors have in recent weeks volunteered to serve as BHCA Block Captains.

Block captains have volunteered to distribute printed material, welcome new neighbors, keep an eye for elderly neighbors, identifying neglected and mismanaged properties and, when comfortable, soliciting for Bolton Hill Community Association membership. Block Captains will help distribute the free dusk-to-dawn light bulbs for the neighborhood made possible with a grant from BGE.

Block Captains still are needed for the following streets, and one need not live on a specific block to volunteer. These currently are uncovered: 1400 Bolton St., 1400 Mount Royal Ave., 1500 Park Avenue, West Lafayette Avenue between; Mason and John streets, the ReNew Mount Vernon apartments and in Spicer's Run. Please contact Lee Tawney if you are interested in participating: lee.tawney@gmail.com

Two MICA artists win \$15,000 in national student art judging

Two MICA students took first and second prize at the highly competitive 2025 student AXA U.S. art competition.

First Prize was awarded to Hazel Paik for her painting titled *Green Sun*. Second Prize has been awarded to Nicole Estelle Brown for her mixed media piece, *Bodily Sacrifice: Operation VA Edition*. Both artists were selected by Prize Jurors, Ali Banisadr and David Antonio Cruz alongside AXA XL's Jennifer Schipf.

The works were showcased in a New York Academy of Art exhibition from Oct. 6 to Nov. 16, alongside finalists from top art schools in Chicago, New York and other U.S. cities. Paik took home \$10,000, and Brown earned \$5,000. The AXA Art Prize, with more than 600 submissions from 150-plus colleges all over the country, has been dominated by MICA entrants since the competition began in 2018.

Guadado Mexican grill is coming, still

In August a member of the family that owns the Sav-a-Lot strip mall announced that he was opening a Mexican taqueria there as early as September. But as anyone who tries to open a new business in Baltimore can tell you, it's never simple. In recent days a "coming soon" sign appeared. Hamza Farooq now says he expects the Chiptole-like shop will open in January.

Guacado Mexican Grill will locate between Walgreen's and the Wash-EZ laundromat at 242 McMechen Street. The Brooklyn-based franchise chain will offer tacos and burrito bowls, birria tacos, chips and guacamole and churros, among other Mexican specialties. It will have 8-to-10 tables plus online takeout orders and delivery, but no liquor license.

City parks agency is holding winter camp for children and teens

The Department of Recreation and Parks is hosting holiday camps for children and teens while school is out after Christmas. For children 5 to 12 there will be painting, dancing, movie-watching and other fun in several city parks facilities, according to Rec and Parks officials. The charge is \$125 per child with a payment plan available. Lunch and snacks are included.

Teens 13 to 17 have access to a wide range of free winter offerings, More information at <https://bcrp.baltimorecity.gov/school%E2%80%99s-out-winter-break-spring-break-camps> .

About The Bulletin

The *Bolton Hill Bulletin* is published monthly, except for July and August. It is designed by Elizabeth Peters. Paula Jackson is our proofreader. We invite others to help with writing, editing, photography or work on the business side. Contributors this month were, among others, Jean Marie Adrian, Adam Aviv, Francine Marchese, Sallye Perrin, Lisa Summers and Lee Tawney. Errors and omissions are the responsibility of the editor, Bill Hamilton. Comments are welcome at bulletin@boltonhillmd.org.

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